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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda**

REVIEW OF THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF WATER RESOURCES IN THE DROUGHT-STRICKEN COUNTRIES OF THE AFRICAN REGION

Executive Summary

LC/NAIROBI

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1. This report, prepared in response to a request by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 1985/49, is being presented both to the ECA Conference of Ministers at its thirteenth meeting in April 1987 and to the Committee on Natural Resources at its tenth session in New York from 6 to 10 April 1987.

2. In the introduction, it reviews the emergency situation which arose from the severe drought in Africa and which, at its height in 1984, affected 20 countries and some 30 million people in sub-Saharan Africa.

3. It discusses the reasons behind the severity of the drought and its wide geographical distribution, and state of knowledge regarding the frequency of droughts. It concludes that while it is not possible to predict or to forecast such droughts at present, it is clear that severe droughts will occur in the future with devastating effects on human and livestock populations unless the present trends of increasing pressure on marginal agricultural lands and accelerating desertification are reversed.

4. Frameworks for action in the short term (including emergency strategies), medium- and long-terms are outlined. In the short term, these are focused on emergency preparedness, co-ordination of relief efforts and establishing a drought plan to aid both national and international support activities.

5. In the medium term, the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development, 1986-1990, is cited as a framework for co-ordinated activity. The themes of the Programme of Action are elaborated in so far as they concern water resources development and the implications of effective action are discussed with reference to (a) strengthening national capabilities, (b) soil and water conservation, (c) acceleration of water and sanitation programmes, and (d) co ordinating external support.

6. The establishment of efficient planning mechanisms is highlighted as an important component of strengthening national capabilities in view of the complex and multidisciplinary nature of water resources development. At the international level, improved co-ordination among donors and between donors and member States is seen as a necessity, particularly since over 50 external support agencies are active in the water resources field and there is an urgent need for a common approach to problems such as operation and maintenance of water supply systems, cost recovery, sectoral strategy and human resources development.

7. A review of the external funcing stratery is also called for, as a consequence of poor progress in many African countries with projects in sub-sectors containing high social or unquantifiable benefits, such as rural water supply, soil and water conservation, sanitation, research and water resources assessment. The strict application of cost-benefit analysis often leads to such projects being difficult to finance. The point is made that to avert crisis situations arising from future droughts, more programme support is needed as opposed to short-term project assistance.

8. In the long-term, several existing frameworks for action already exist, e.g. the Mar del Plata Action Plan of the United Nations Water Conference, the Lagos Plan of Action and the Cairo Programme for African Co-operation on Environment and Eco development.

9. In economic terms, the nature of practical long-term planning is examined and it can be seen that it differs in concept from the type of indicative plan which merely lists priorities and possible projects with no programmed outputs or financial estimates.

10. It is suggested that for the time being the existing long-term frameworks are adequate for indicating long-term objectives and that governments should focus attention on strengthening their planning teams to enable them to translate the long-term strategy into comprehensive medium-term plans (i.e. phased programmes with financial implication). It is particularly important to programme and monitor the current priority programme for economic recovery and, to a large extent, future planning will depend on progress with this medium-term programme.

11. In conclusion, the report refers to the lessons which have been learned from the recent emergency and the improvements in the state of preparedness of both national governments and the international community. It emphasizes the importance of implementing the medium-term measures as outlined in the United Nations Programme for African Economic Recovery and Development and as expanded in this report. It repeats the plea for strengthening planning mechanisms in the drought-stricken countries in order to facilitate the linkage between medium- and long-term planning.

12. Finally, the need for subregional and regional co-ordinating mechanisms in the fight against drought and desertification is also emphasized, and the support of subregional organizations such as the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Desertification (ICADD) and the international river and lake basin organizations is stressed as an important element in the strategy for the drought-prone countries. At the regional level, the need for greater information exchange, particularly regarding new technologies and programmes such as the establishment of "green belts" is encouraged.

13. At the international or global level, the consequences of widespread environmental degradation in Africa could have a global dimension in so far as they affect the general evaluation and the earth's energy balance. For this reason, the international community should have a particular interest in the plight of Africa and in supporting the efforts to rectify the present environmental trends.